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RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0951
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4512
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8042
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5603
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1425
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000160

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA'S GENERALS WANT OUT

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (C) Summary: Prominent Burmese businessman Zaw Naing told us the senior generals are tired of the increasing international attention and pressure. They are desperate for an exit, but afraid they and their families will be prosecuted, jailed, and their fortunes confiscated. They are determined to stick with the draft constitution to maintain firm control of the political process and ensure their safety and well being. Zaw Naing advocated resuming the Beijing talks so the U.S. could explain its policy in person to high-level Burmese officials. He predicted most Burmese businessmen would vote for the new constitution in the upcoming referendum, as they see no other viable alternative for Burma to move forward. End summary.

Tired, Desperate, and Afraid

12. (C) Embassy contact Zaw Naing is a successful businessman who has high-level interaction with Burma's ruling generals, but is also sympathetic to the pro-democracy opposition. Zaw Naing just returned from Nay Pyi Taw where he spoke to several of the senior generals. He described their mentality as "animals trapped in a corner." The generals are tired of the increasing international attention to the political situation in Burma and are desperate for an exit, he believed, including Than Shwe. What prevents them from actually ceding power, he claimed, was a deep fear that they and their families will be prosecuted, jailed, and their fortunes confiscated. The generals also do not want to accept exile, he added, and have a strong desire to remain in Burma. This is why the constitution has been drafted to ensure the military will maintain firm control of the political process, trusting their military successors will take care of their own.

13. (C) Zaw Naing asserted that the majority of the military remain deeply distrustful of the pro-democracy opposition and see them as the enemy. They regard the opposition as political opportunists controlled by foreign powers that do

not have Burma's best interest at heart. That said, many of the generals do not want to rule the country any longer, but do not know how to exit gracefully while protecting their personal and financial interests. The draft constitution is the only solution they trust, and they are determined to proceed with their roadmap without compromising on key provisions that maintain the military's grip on power.

Resume the Beijing Talks

14. (C) Zaw Naing advocated the U.S. resume face-to-face dialogue with the regime. While the process may be slow and frustrating, he claimed it would offer an opportunity for the high-level Burmese officials to hear U.S. positions explained in person, rather than relying on the anti-regime exile press as the main source of information on U.S. Burma policy. Zaw Naing noted that Than Shwe confidant and Minister of Culture Khin Aung Myint had participated in the Beijing talks last June. The Minister of Culture was the most direct channel the U.S. had to Than Shwe, he believed, and the U.S. could use the opportunity to advocate democratic reform through the minister.

Don't Count on a Coup

15. (C) Asked about the cohesiveness of the senior generals, Zaw Naing asserted that they would stick together. The U.S. should not count on a coup to overthrow Than Shwe any time soon, Zaw Naing added; the military is the only game in town. Officers previously caught plotting coups were severely dealt with, as were their families. The officer corps has internalized this message, Zaw Naing concluded. He continued

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that not all officers at the top are stupid or bad. Zaw Naing had just returned from a meeting in Bago Division with Southern Commander Major General Ko Ko, whom he praised as intelligent, sophisticated, honest, patient, and well-aware of Burma's economic backwardness. Ko Ko is close to Than Shwe's wife, Kyaing Kyaing, Zaw Naing shared.

Some Will Vote "Yes"

16. (C) Regarding the thinking of Burma's business community on the upcoming constitutional referendum, Zaw Naing elaborated that his conversations with professional colleagues led him to conclude that many would vote "yes" during the upcoming referendum. Many Burmese believe that an imperfect constitution is better than the status quo. They believe that a rejection of the constitution would return the country to a long period of re-drafting and there would be no opportunity to move forward with elections or economic reform, Zaw Naing explained. Additionally, the pro-democracy movement had not succeeded in making a case that they were a viable alternative to the regime, Zaw Naing claimed. Many Burmese, including the ethnic nationalities, wondered if the opposition was competent to manage a chaotic transition.

7 (C) Comment: We have heard from many that Than Shwe is tired and wants to step aside, but fears for his family's financial future. We will not be able to persuade him directly, or through close advisors, to step aside unless we are willing to offer him guaranteed protection. He fears democracy because he fears retribution. End comment.

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